Bella Coola Indians- Chapter IV

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(811.50/1500-419)

New page

# Chapter IV (10 pt. rom. caps)

## RANK (10 pt. rom. caps)

## CHIEFTAINSHIP (10 pt. Boldface c.+l.c.)

The unsystematic method by which ancestral names are inherited as described in the foregoing chapter shows that their possession, though valued for sentimental reasons, is not enough to make the owner a chief. Chieftainship depends on the number ~~a~~ and value of presents distributed at ceremonials. To the Bella Coola, every rite is a prerogative; whether it be a marriage, the bestowal of a name, a dance, a funeral, or admission into a secret society, it is intimately associated with the myth by which the performance is authorized. The host is really displaying the glories of his ancestors before the eyes of guests, present at the ceremony. Such ceremonies are never performed without giving presents to all; failure to do so would destroy their value. The potlatch is the ceremonial requiring the most lavish generosity, but the principle of acquiring prestige by giving presents is the same for all other rites. At a potlatch wealth is displayed to a larger number of recipients, hence every ambitious man aims to hold potlatches, since his status in the community virtually rests on his ability in this respect. The first essential is to consider the principles of present giving;

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Consider, for example, a man who wishes to take for himself one of his ancestral names, and at the same time to ~~display~~ portray certain features of his ancestral myth, ~~such as~~ a particular type of house, ~~or~~ totem-pole, or dance used by one of his ~~first~~ forefathers. ~~ancestors, the originator of the name he is about to take.~~ He invites guests to his house, displays the features of his myth, and must give a present to each to show the value of his prerogative and to demonstrate that he has not merely casually usurped the functions in question. In giving ~~to a guest~~ visitor a present of, for ~~example~~ instance, $20.00, it is as if he said to the recipient: ~~He~~

~~consider, briefly, the attitude of the Bella Coola with regard to presents cer-~~
~~emonially given. If a man invites guests to see his house, his totem pole, or~~ ~~3161~~ a dance
~~any other feature embodied in his myth, and gives to one of them a present,~~ ancestral such as the acquisition of a name
~~for example,~~
~~$20.00, it is as if he said to the recipient:~~

"See! These are the glories of my ancestors of whom I am the descendant. I have a part in their fame. To make this valid I give you from my wealth a mere trifle, a matter of no consequence to me, who am so firmly established in the path of my ancestors."

The guest receives the money with mixed feelings. He has received $20 as a "present". But if he wishes to elevate his own position and prestige, together with that of his ancestors, he must repay this sum with interest. A Bella Coola will in some cases endeavour to shame the poverty of a guest by giving him a large present. Unless the recipient is willing to admit his inferiority he must repay this with a still larger gift. The original donor will then increase the value of his next gift until a fierce competition ensues. This feature of rivalry in generosity is rare in Bella Coola, and never reached the same proportions that it did among the Kwakiutł. Contrary to the practice among some other coastal tribes, there is no fixed rate of interest among the Bella Coola. An ambitious man who seeks to become a chief will strive to the utmost to repay with heavy interest when he gives a ceremony, so that his fame will be carried far and near. If he should repay only the principal, he would be regarded as having done all that was obligatory, but should he fail to

do even so much he would soon sink to a position of little consequence, no matter how distinguished his ancestral name might be.

In this respect a close parallel exists between the Bella Coola and ourselves. If a man is invited to a dinner-party, he is not compelled to return the compliment, but if he fails to reciprocate in any way the hospitality he has accepted, he is apt to lose his place among his social associates. As with ourselves, too, there is a disguised feeling of contempt for the parvenu, the man who, lacking the traditional dignity attached to one of the names which came from above at the beginning of time, has elevated the fame of a more recent designation by ostentatious giving. In Bella Coola, as elsewhere, however, success is the great criterion, and the donor of many potlatches finds his influence little impaired by the lack of one of the ancient origin myths.

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The following is a good instance of the manner in which a haughty man regards the acceptance of gifts: A Rivers Inlet man married a Calvert Island woman, and his mother, to show her amiable feelings towards the marriage, frequently gave thick slices of boned Spring Salmon, a great delicacy, to the family of her daughter-in-law. The Calvert Island chief considered these presents as an indication that the Rivers Inlet people thought that he and his people were poverty-stricken. To avenge this slight he made war on the Rivers Inlet Indians and slew many of them. His attitude was felt by the Bella Coola to be quite natural. One of their own chiefs might have resented the insult in the same manner.

Further concrete examples may help to clarify this point. A few years ago a number of Kwakiutl Indians visited Bella Coola ~~for the purpose of~~ to performing a mourning ceremony in honor of a deceased Bella Coola who had a Kwakiutl name from his grandfather, a member of that tribe. All the ~~Bella Coola~~ local inhabitants were invited to a large house where the visitors gave a dance according to their own ancestral myths; ~~and~~ the songs which were used recounted the history of the Kwakiutl name of the deceased Bella Coola. After thus displaying themselves their prerogatives, the visitors felt obliged, ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ and proud, to give presents as validation. The sum of $346.00 was distributed among the Bella Coola. Realizing that it would be impossible to return such a sum by ~~xxxxxxxx~~ holding ceremonials in ~~x~~ Fort Rupert, the home of the Kwakiutl, the leading Bella Coola decided to return the compliment immediately. The amount to be given was discussed at great length. The Bella Coola, appreciating the courtesy of their guests in thus coming to pay honor to a deceased Bella Coola, did not wish to insult them by giving a larger present, which would have had the effect of intimating that the recipients considered the $346.00 a trifling amount. Accordingly it was finally agreed to give the visitors ~~a sum of~~ about $300.00, which was done ~~xxxxxxxx~~ as validation of a Bella Coola ceremony at which the visitors were present. Thus the Bella Coola allowed themselves to be shamed as a mark of courtesy. Not to be outdone in politeness, the Kwakiutl chief made a speech, expressing his willingness to allow the Bella Coola to drive him ~~xx~~ (this occurred in the days of horses and carts) to the wharf to take the steamer. In other words, he allowed ~~xxxxxxx~~ the Bella Coola to put him in their debt, as they had allowed him and his party to do with respect to the distribution of money. The visit terminated with friendly relations maintained on both sides.

~~The following is an instance of~~ The need ~~to~~ of validating every ceremonial act by presents, can, perhaps, be most clearly shown by the following instance. When the writer was in Bella Coola, a non-ceremonial entertainment was given one evening at which several Indians sang and performed. The writer was asked to sing a Bella Coola song which he did in the belief that it was not one that was incorporated in the ancestral myth of anyone. Unfortunately, his teacher had erred, and as soon as the song was completed an old woman arose and stated that it ~~was a song which~~ belonged to her ancestral family. She avoided the difficulty of its singing

by immediately announcing that the singer was her "son". Thus the writer was adopted into a Bella Coola family, a circumstance which aided him considerably in collecting information. ~~But~~ This did not alter the fact that a ceremonial song had been sung. Accordingly, ~~she~~ the woman gave presents to the guests, thereby demonstrating the legality of the singing, and saving herself from the disgrace of having one of her songs sung as if it were a matter of no consequence, free to anyone.

~~[illegible]~~

Seating.

Leaving now the abstract concepts of presents as means of validating ritual acts and acquiring prestige, we pass to a concrete example, namely, the obtaining of a seat, of their use. As described in the previous chapter, every Bella Coola has at least one name embodied in an ancient myth. A man who wishes to become a chief can only do so by the giving of lavish presents to make his name "strong", "firm", or "bright", to use Bella Coola expressions. Such gifts not only increase the importance of the owner's name, ~~but~~ they also obtain for him a seat, more or less definitely located, in the house. Since all Bella Coola houses are built on similar lines, a man can occupy his wonted position when summoned to a ceremony in any house. The validating of ancestral names and the acquisition of seats are features which occur at potlatches, two reasons for the importance of this ceremony. The actual ritual of establishment will be described in the last section of this chapter.

No space

~~GIGS~~

~~SEATING~~.

~~It will be~~ In order ~~on account~~ of the potlatch to describe first ~~the order~~ of seating.

In the beginning of time, according to the Bella Coola, a certain number of people were sent down to populate the earth. It is assumed that each of these established a village, consisting of a single house, seated himself in the best spot within the dwelling, namely the central position in front of the fire, with two corresponding ranges of positions, on in two rows, facing one another on opposite sides of the central fire, parallel to the side walls of the house. In course of time these first ancestors died, but the name of each was passed on to some descendant. The Bella Coola feel that he who bears the name of the first settler in a village should have his ancestor's seat at the back of the house. Comparison with the practices of other coastal tribes suggests that formerly the Bella Coola must have had a definite series of seats in their houses, ~~to~~ either according to the rank of the occupant, or according to the rank of the ancestor whose name he bears. The most careful investigation ~~has~~ failed to show such a system of ranked seating. The only indications that such may once have been customary, are found in the feeling today that the bearer of the first chief's name ought to occupy the central seat behind the fire, and in the expression, "He seats himself where his ancestor sat," when a youth is given his place in the house. This may take place at any age. An ancestral name is assumed ~~this refer to several terms used in village life, and implies the~~ rise of no great dignity, ~~instead of validating the noble title of potlatch~~ importance. ~~Name still in first ways by which in some localities with,~~ certain ~~that would be well regarded~~, and ~~lands~~ must be given away. Those are

~~Chief~~

said to be "covering" for the ~~child, or~~ young man, to have "flowed away", or to have "become nothing" for the name. These goods validate the official presentation of the ~~new~~ name. With it is given a place in the house. A seat is chosen at the side of the fire, and the goods mark ~~the owner~~ ~~that the seat is~~ in conjunction with ~~with reference to~~ the name. The seat itself is not materially, though the general spot on which a person shall sit is indicated His "seat" is the goods that have been expended. Several men may have seats at practically the same spot, but when all are seated they merely move slightly so that all have room. There is no thought of one person infringing on the location of another. ~~The~~ a parent ~~of a young man~~ who gives large quantities of goods at successive potlatches may decide to obtain for his son a seat behind the fire. Such is entirely his own affair and if sufficient goods are distributed the son may seat himself in that place, but if the gifts are of little value the occupant is secretly held up in derision, as having a seat that is unsound, or infirm. In later years the man may expend large sums in strengthening his seat; by so doing he wins recognition from all that he sits in an enviable seat, irrespective of the hereditary in the house. ~~No one but a chief, there is the least objection.~~

In precisely the same manner ~~the owner~~ may ~~make~~ for himself a seat in the central part of the row behind the fire. ~~He~~ is laughed at for endeavouring to assume a dignity, unworthily, unless he ~~could~~ can validate his position by presents. The Bella Coola are always ready to make fun of a person who fails to maintain his seat. On the death of the occupant of the central position it is taken for granted that whoever inherits his name will assume his seat and give the essential presents, but it is by no means incumbent upon him to do so. He may

mid to be "covering" for the child

~~Chap~~

always to establish his new name at his old station, beside, instead of behind, the fire. Thus it has come to pass that the seat of the most important chief a village is often at the side of the house, not behind the fire. When all are seated the chiefs may be in different parts of the room, while a parent may have obtained for his son a seat in a better part of the house than his own. But as a rule the chiefs sit in a row at the back of the fire, the most influential one in the middle. It appears certain that there must have been feuds when two chiefs desired to seat themselves in the central position at the same time. But disputes about this ~~it is clear that such feuds~~ were uncommon, because a man's seat was primarily and still is regarded as the intangible goods wherewith he is clothed, rather than his right to sit at any particular spot. It is these non-material clothes which enable a chief to be bold and assertive in argument, or suggestion, to act as a chief. A young man may have had conferred on him one of the highest honours but his influence depends on the value of the goods expended on his behalf, subject of course to the universal law of human nature by which a man of forceful character may have more influence than his actual position warrants.

Jealous feuds are common when the man who owns the name of the first chief, first ancestor of a village, has duly validated it, but is being eclipsed in the giving of potlatches by a man of less ancient rank who is frequently giving potlatches. Such a complication recently arose at Kimsquit, and the Bella Coola ascribe two murders which took place there in 1915 to jealousy engendered by rivalry.

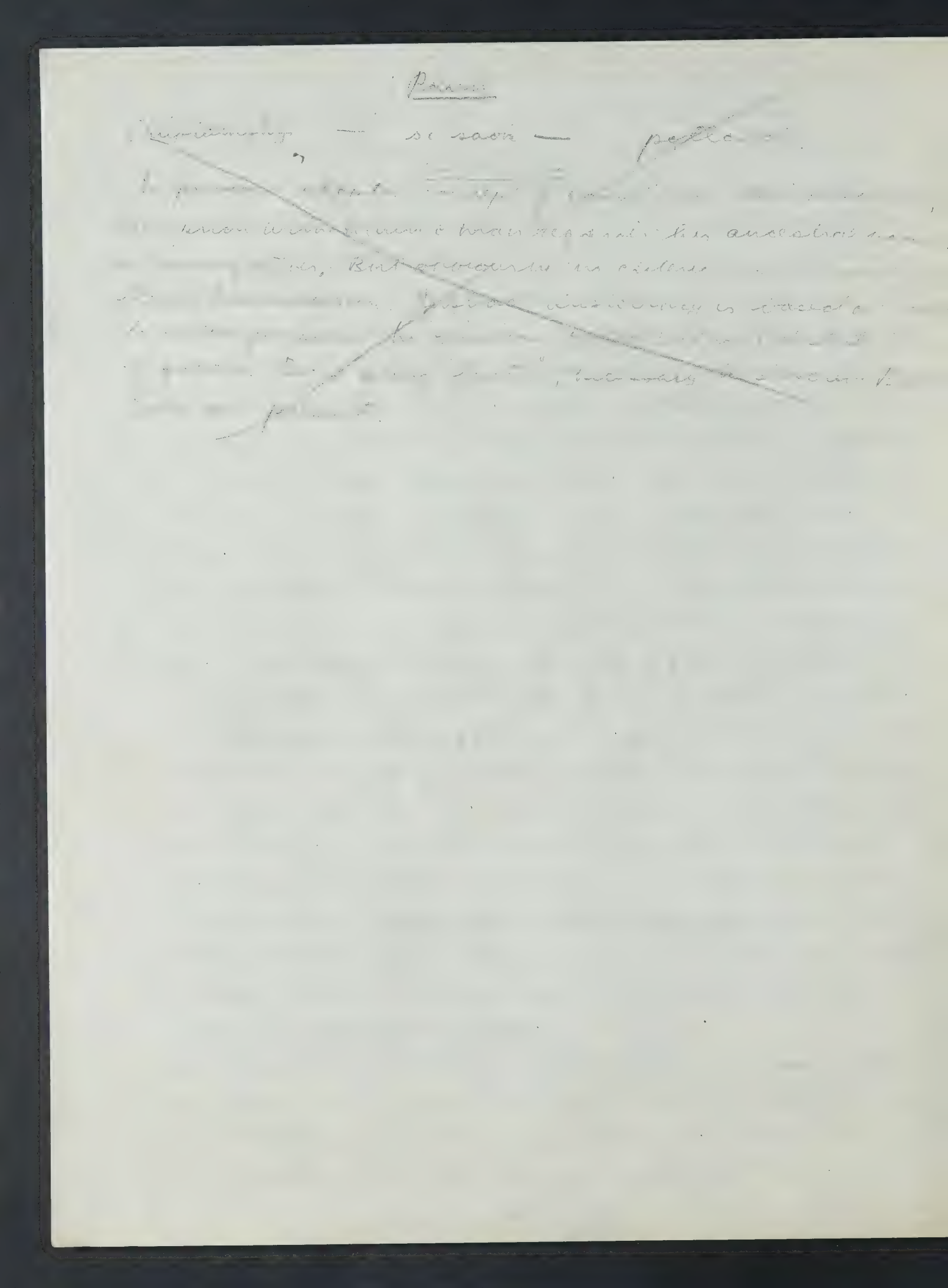
A chief may desire to have his son, or other near relative, succeed to his actual seat. In that case he validates for his son a position at his feet. If ~~any~~

[illegible] his [illegible] at his old station, beside, instead of behind, the fire. Thus it has come to pass that the seat of the most important chief of [illegible] village is at the side of the house, not behind the fire. When all are seated the chiefs may be in different parts of the house, while a parent may have obtained for a son a seat behind the fire. But as a rule the chief's seat is always at the back of the fire, the most influential man in the village.

several potlatches be given, with distribution of goods for this purpose, it becomes recognized that the son shall take his father's seat. None the less, he will not have his father's influence or prestige unless he can himself continue to give away goods, because it is on this that the power of a chief rests, and not on his ancient name or the location of his seat.

Further evidence of the fact that a man's influence rests, less on his actual name than on the wealth distributed with reference to it, is found in the lack of uniformity in the type of names validated. wide difference of opinion regarding what names it is best to use. Those of highest potential importance are the ones brought to this earth by the first comers, yet frequently a man prefers to elevate his position with respect to a name of later origin. It is not uncommon for a man to validate several ancestral names, and choose one of them to be his most important by valuable gifts for the seat which he occupies with respect to it. Frequently the name selected is one of modern origin rather than one which came to earth with the first people. Thus, a certain Bella Coola chief who is the legal owner of the names Q̇eit and Xemlaix, two of the first people to settle this earth, has based his greatness on the goods expended for a seat with reference to the name Siäkxeläx, of more modern origin. It is accordingly clear that any Bella Coola can rise to a position of great importance, even though he lacks the right to one of the most ancient names. Other chiefs prefer to validate several names rather than concentrate on one alone.

Moreover, a powerful chief can create a name. In this case the "power" of the name rests, not in any supernatural origin, but in the actual wealth distributed, in itself an affair of great importance. Two examples will serve to illustrate this point. About forty years ago the uncle of one of the writer's informants was preparing to give a potlatch at which his nephew was to receive a name, when fire destroyed the village with the exception of his uncle's house. This added to the actual value of the food and goods distributed, since it was winter and the people were in dire straits on account of the destruction of all their stores. In consequence, his informant's uncle decided to make a new name for his nephew, Skäm, "Charred Wood." By virtue of the goods expended, this name became an honourable title, and was maintained as such by lavish presents. Any similar peculiarity connected with a potlatch can be made the origin of a name. Another type of manufactured name is derived from some peculiarity of the name giving the potlatch, usually an obscene allusion. Thus one



Since a seat is valuable only on account of the goods expended in obtaining it with respect to a certain name, it is obvious that names and seats are closely associated. A man who wishes his son to succeed to his own location in the house seats the youth, at this feet. It may be years before he takes his father's position,

though ~~rush~~ weabling. owned by a ~~feeble chief~~. As the Bella Coola express it, he becomes hermaphroditized.

A woman is rarely established in a seat, and usually only ~~when~~ she has no sons or other near male descendants. In such a case she receives an ancestral name which has the same status as a ~~male~~ man. ~~Then the writer was in Bella Coola~~ at the present time, one important chief ~~has~~ obtained a seat for his daughter, ~~the~~ the ancestral name given to her created for her (See Chapter VII). The designations of the first women to occupy this earth are reserved for women and, like men's, vary in prestige according to the prowess of their owners. Most names given to children, though embodied in origin myths, are applicable to either sex; these are the common designations of women. Cases are known in which a woman has assumed an ancestral name if her brother has allowed it to fall into ill-repute through failure to give potlatches.

With a system so fluid, no fixed line can be drawn between chief and commoner. After his fourth potlatch a man's influence in the community has become so great that he will

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~~By the time a man has given four potlatches he~~ usually feel himself justified in having the carpenters make for him a material seat. There is nothing to prevent a person having one made for him before he has given the requisite number of potlatches, but he realizes that a too rapid assumption of a material seat may render him liable to the scorn of the community through his failure to show himself sufficiently "strong". The contempt with which any attempt to usurp too lofty a place is regarded acts as a strong deterrent to a proud young man.

On the material seat are carved the man's ancestral crests, in other words the forms in which his first ancestors came to earth, or some of the creatures with whom they came in contact. To display these is a matter of pride to a man; unless the display is fittingly validated, the man's own dignity will be lowered, as well as that of his ancestors. The construction of a material seat is particularly common when a man is establishing himself in the central position behind the fire, and claims this to be where his first ancestor sat. Others among the first people may have chosen seats in other parts of the house, and in these likewise, a man who is taking his ancestral name will often have a material seat constructed. It is said that,

"He seats himself where his ancestor sat."

Establishment in such a position increases a chief's feeling of mental superiority; it is as if he had the age-long power of his ancestor to strengthen him.

Finally, in old age, a powerful chief is careless where he seats himself; his fame is so great that he can afford to disregard all conventions.

Power of Chiefs (small caps)

It will be seen from the foregoing that chiefta[illegible]ship among the Bella Coola does not depend on hereditary rank, still less on an elective principle, but on the individual's prestige as displayed, especially, in his ability to acquire for himself a firm seat by the giving away of presents. As he continues to do so his influence grows. ~~becomes ever greater~~. Consequently, it is impossible to state clearly the powers of a chief; such depend upon his prestige and influence. ~~For~~ A Bella Coola chief has no executive ~~authority~~ or judicial authority; what deference is shown to him depends on his success as a man.

The coming of the white man has enabled the Bella Coola to earn comparatively large sums of money by trapping and fishing. This in turn has made it possible for nearly everyone to give at least one potlatch, whereas fifty years ago a man had to toil for years to amass the necessary food and skins. Formerly, in many towns no men had given potlatches, and a man's prestige was estimated by the presents he had given at smaller ceremonies. In some moreover, a man preferred to increase his fame by rites of a different nature, such as kusiut dances, and the presents then distributed might elevate him in the eyes of the community to a position above that of a man who had given a potlatch. This, however, was unusual.

[illegible] is termed a [illegible] chief. [illegible] an untranslatable word, with the significance of "passage". The allusion is to the amount of goods which have passed through his hands, through a passage. Jealous and vulgar-minded persons pun on the word, referr it to the anal passage. It is after a man has given four potlatches that he feels himself superior to those who have been unable to do likewise. His name and so, likewise, his seat. is "bright", "clean", "heavy", "firm", or "upright", in Bella Coola terms, and he feels that he can go where he pleases, that the road is clear before him, that he can throw back his head with disdain. Such a chief will fearlessly enter the back room where ceremonial rites are taking place, even if not entitled to do so.

"He is so strong he can go where he will," say the Bella Coola.

[illegible] is taken, not because he has any executive authority, but on account of his ability and prestige.

This is especially noticeable, of course, among the members of a chief's own family. A few years ago, for example, when a certain Bella Coola died, his brother wished a kusiut name-prerogative of the deceased to pass to the dead man's daughter. The girl's mother's father, a numitl chief, objected, and his desires were followed although the name in question was not one connected in any way with his family. In small matters, too, people are only too glad to carry out the wishes of a chief. If work is required around the house the chief can order it to be done, and no one would think of disobedience. The writer once asked an old Indian whether, when he was a young man, chiefs [illegible] gave many orders and [illegible] acted as masters in their households.

"You bet", the old man answered emphatically with a dry chuckle.

At the present time it is difficult to form an accurate [illegible] es-

~~1924~~

timate, from observation, of the influence of ~~a~~ chiefs solely through virtue of the goods they have expended. ~~Accordingly~~ But the following ~~instance~~ is a concrete example. ~~valuable,~~ In November 1923 ~~when~~ the writer was walking through the Bella Coola village ~~one day,~~ when he was bitten by a dog. Somewhat annoyed, he inquired to whom the animal belonged, and was told that it was the property of a certain old woman, and, moreover, that it was a bad dog since it bit people. With this statement the writer agreed heartily. When next he saw the owner he asked her whether she knew that her dog ~~was~~ bit people.

"Yes," she answered, in a matter-of-fact tone, ~~of course,~~ "He is a chief and can do what he likes."

Further questioning elicited the information that the old woman and her husband, the childless last survivors of an ancestral family, had transmitted ~~the~~ some of their ancestral names to their dog, and had distributed presents to validate the bestowal. Consequently, their dog is a chief and can do as he likes. When the animal dies he will be mourned as a chief. Moreover, a number of people have returned the presents which they received at the time the dog was made a chief, and this money is kept by the woman and her husband; it will be used when they perform the rite of mourning for the dog at death.

When this is possible, even in the present degenerate days, it is not difficult to understand how, ~~in~~ former days, a great chief felt himself above the restraints that hindered lesser men. The last great Bella Coola chief was Pot!ɛs, who died about fifty years ago. His influence and power were so great that he was a virtual ruler, daring anything. If he requested a young man to take his food box home and the youth was slow ~~to~~ obeying, Pot!ɛs had no hesitation in killing him on the spot. Such great power, though unusual, is intelligible to the Bella Coola since Pot!ɛs gave far more potlatches than any of his contemporaries. Other chiefs have been known to attempt a similar arbitrary use of power, but have failed, since their prestige was not great enough to justify it. ~~carry them through.~~ The fame of ~~such~~ a mighty chief spreads up and down the coast, and so highly is he respected, that neither himself nor any member of his family will be slain in one of the ambushes which used to be of common occurrence. Conditions during an actual fight were different; ~~and~~ then a chief had to take his chances with the rest, but the comparative immunity was a great ad-

vantage.

The Bella Coola recognize the funadamental differences between their own concepts about chieftainship and those of other coastal tribes with whom they have come in contact. This point was mentioned in the course of conversation by several men. informants. The most powerful chief known to the Bella Coola was Tcabesa, who, they say, was virtual monarch of the Kitkatla. None of his subjects could go hunting without his permission, and he had rights to a certain share of their booty. At any ceremony presents had first to be given to him, and if he were slighted in this respect, he would kill the offender. It is believed that all the Kitkatla chiefs were powerful, but Tcabesa was the greatest of all. It is said that one of his prerogatives (said to have been a personal prerogative, not shared by all chiefs, and requiring validation by valuable presents), was to exercise jus primae noctis within his tribe. Tales of this chief's prowess have become exaggerated in transmission, but they show that the Bella Coola realize the great importance of the northern chiefs. Concerning their nearer neighbour the Bella Bella, they understand the way in which the members of a family combine to help their chief in the giving of presents. They say that the Bella Bella consider the Bella Coola practice of each one endeavouring to make himself a chief to be foolish in the extreme. Such is also said to be the opinion among the Kwakiutl, who support their contention that in Bella Coola all are chiefs, from the fact that flooring exists under the seats of all, whereas in Fort Rupert, their home, such occurs only beneath the seats of chiefs.

Corresponding to the extreme paucity of functions possessed by Bella Coola chiefs, their prerogatives are likewise scanty. Indeed, they only take their validated seats during certain rites of the secret society connected with chiefs, at potlatches, and at ceremonial meals. These last occur whenever a deer or seal is killed; the latter is considered a great delicacy.(3) Anyone can kill a seal, but it would be unthinkable for a Bella Coola to share its flesh only with his immediate family. The animal is cleaned, the hole made by

(3). Only traces of the rite described in this paragraph occur at the present time. In fact, the reservation of seal meat for chiefs alone was discontinued about forty years ago.

by bullet or spear carefully plugged, and the carcass boiled whole in a large box. Meanwhile a herald (1) summons the chiefs to the house where the successful hunter lives. If the meal is to consist ~~only~~ merely of one small seal, ~~only a~~ but a few chiefs are invited, those favoured being the ones of greatest influence through their ~~xxxxx~~ possession of "strong" seats. When several seals have been killed, the number invited is correspondingly ~~greater~~ larger, but no woman may ever partake, unless she ranks as a man by the duly validated ownership of a chief's name in her own right. Formerly, no slave was ever allowed to eat seal, unless he had actually been the slayer. ~~of it.~~ The chiefs seated themselves according to their proper positions and ~~were~~ are first served with the blood stained grease that floated to the top of the water as the ~~animal was xxxxxxx~~ meat is boiling. When cooked, it ~~was~~ is cut into longitudinal strips, measured in terms of so many fingerbreadths, according to the number of guests. The cuts run down each fore-flipper, so that each receives a narrow strip including one of the toes. The head is always given to the herald. (2). If a large number of seals are killed, chiefs from adjacent villages are sometimes invited.

Wealthy chiefs ~~xxxx~~ frequently invite their fellows to meals even when no seal or deer has been killed, and when, accordingly, the food is nothing unusual. On these occasions, as ~~at~~ at seal feasts, the guests are ~~called~~ designated by their ancestral names, ~~and~~ not by those in general use.

Chiefs are also accustomed to meet for the discussion of matters connected with the winter ceremonial (3); on such occasions their ~~ranks~~ number may be augmented by men of influence in the secret society, ~~xxxxxxxx~~ though they do not possess rank as chiefs. ~~Xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ Such a meeting is always called when a new member is to be initiated into the kusiut society. If there is difference of opinion as to the desirability of the step the influence of eben a numiti chief is outweighed by a man of importance in the kusiut society. The matter is discussed by all present and ~~consensus of opinion~~ a decision reached ~~with~~ by general agree-

(1). See page .
(2). Every effort was made to insure the accuracy of this account, but errors may have crept in on account of the length of time which has elapsed since the ceremony was carried out in full detail.
(3). See page .

ment. It is difficult for a white man to understand how such is possible without either a vote, or ~~him~~ general recognition by all that the views of some individual must be accepted. The writer was present at one such meeting, and was struck by the manner in which, after x considerable, and at times heated, discussion, a consensus of opinion was reached, and accepted even by those who had proposed a contrary course.

Near every village there is a place where the chiefs hold such meetings. All the inhabitants know the general locality, but they are so impressed with ~~the~~ supernatural dread of the powers possessed by members of the ~~xxxxxxx~~ Kusiut society that none would dare go there. If an uninitiated person should do so, he would ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ formerly have been either killed or initiated into the ~~ranks of the~~ society. ~~Kusiut~~. The meeting-place of the Qomo'ts chiefs is on a ledge ~~x~~ rock jutting out over a waterfall about a quarter of a mile from the village. The stream winds down a narrow cleft of the mountain side, screened by dense vegetation, and suddenly falls into a cauldron, so hemmed in by precipitous cliffs that no sunlight can enter. The ledge is immediately above the brink of the falls, one of the most awe-inspiring places ever seen by the writer. The meeting-places of other villages lack such natural ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ features, though all are at the bases of cliffs, or near some easily distinguished feature. Some of them are decorated with rude carvings, pecked into the stone. The meaning of the designs ~~are~~ is not known by any of the present inhabitants. Some of them were made, long ago, by chiefs when they were composing tunes; ~~and who~~ they picked out the rock in time to ~~the~~ the music forming ~~within~~ their minds. Others were mere memorials of certain events. If a chief gave an important ceremony, he, or one of his friends, carved a figure, perhaps that of a man, perhaps of some animal connected with the ceremony, to recall ~~to mind~~ the ~~ceremony~~ event. No carvings have been made within the life-time of any Bella Coola, so it is possible that they had further significance, now unknown.

When a chief wishes to summon his fellows for a meeting he does so by vi-

visits each and notifies him by a simple pressure of the foot, in many cases unobserved even by those sitting near. The person so called slips away, unostentatiously, to the meeting-place.

The position of chief was not without disadvantages in the old days. The Bella Coola are so jealous that anyone who succeeded in elevating himself to a position above his fellows became an object of envy. Their mythology contains many examples of the murder of some powerful chief by rivals of his own village, and informants of today state that these records are true. One intelligent man asserted that his father had thus been slain about seventy years ago. It appears that attempts were commonly made to kill chiefs by means of sympathetic magic, and it is quite possible that such attempts, becoming known, preyed upon the minds of the victims to such an extent that death resulted.

## WEALTH

Since wealth is so important in chieftainship, it would be desirable at this point to consider the concepts of wealth. Unfortunately, it is impossible to give a satisfactory treatment of this subject. The coming of the white man altered the economic aspect of Bella Coola life so radically, and at such an early period, that concrete examples of economic interdependence, so useful in a thorough study, could not be obtained in the field. It is possible that greater attention to this subject might have produced more satisfactory results, but I am doubtful of this.

In the old days, "wealth" was of two categories: (a) Prerogatives, tangible or intangible, which could be shown, pictorially

or dramatically, or could be expounded in words and (b) goods which could be distributed for validating such prerogatives. Individual possessions, unsuited for distribution, were hardly considered as wealth; a sewing-machine, a bottle of whiskey, a bed, or some other luxury might give satisfaction to the owner, but did not increase his importance in the eyes of his fellows. The value of objects was only for their use in ceremonial distribution; indeed, prior to such distribution, they were only of potential value. This attitude controlled Bella Coola economics in the early days of contact, and still influences their behavior. A native store-keeper once ruefully commented on the fact that he would gain no advantage from the goods on his shelves, since he hoped merely to sell them, not to give them away.

A man's relatives were expected to help him in the acquisition of goods, but the extent of their contributions was never standardized. Boys and girls helped their parents, and there was no definite age at which they ceased to do so. The fluidity of the Bella Coola system was contrary to any standardization. The more important a chief became, the more did he receive from dependent relatives, but the more did they expect in the way of "return presents". It was advantageous to be generous, within the family circle as well as without, since life was so public that every transaction even of a private nature, was well known. Unquestionably, a greedy and strong-minded individual must frequently have taken advantage of help from his housemates, but there was no strict code of ethics in regard to this. In brief, it may be said that the acquisition of wealth was an unstandardized, individual, matter; its distribution was likewise according to individual volition, although within a rigidly defined tribal pattern for public distribution.

## SUSACK SOCIETY.

The ancestral names that chiefs desire to raise to a position of eminence are usually embodied in myths dealing with the first settlement of this earth, which belong, as has been stated, to the ancestral family. Many of these traditions record other designations as well, each of which carries with it the prerogative of performing a type of dance known as s saok. These will be spoken of, henceforth, as s saok names. The Bella Coola do not know the meaning of this term. These names like ancestral ones, are the potential property of members of the ancestral family, but can only be assumed when duly validated by presents. Such an assumption follows a period of seclusion in the back-room of the house. Both men and women are eligible. A person may be secluded in this way a number of times, acquiring a new s saok name on each occasion, but as presents must be distributed every time, it follows that only the children or relatives of wealthy chiefs can be so favoured.

It is desirable to have the bestowal of a sɩsaok name occur at a potlatch, since guests from foreign tribes are then present, and the fame of the initiate is thereby carried farther afield than would be possible if only Bella Coola were in attendance. Every individual duly secluded and given a sɩsaok name feels himself ceremonially allied to others who have had a similar experience, and they form a grouping which may be termed the sɩsaok secret society.

The close connection between this society and chiefs is obvious from the presence of the names of each type in the same ancestral myths. None the less, every chief, that is a person with duly validated ancestral name and seat, is not a sɩsaok unless he has validated a sɩsaok name for himself and undergone the period of seclusion. Conversely, a man may be a duly authorized member of the sɩsaok while lacking a seat and the other marks of chieftainship. The relationship is, however, so close that the Bella Coola think of the sɩsaok society as a society of chiefs. Sɩsaok dances take place at potlatches and funerals, and occasionally at gatherings of less importance. Difficulties arise at the death of a chief who has failed to use some of his goods for the acquisition of a sɩsaok name. Such a case took place at the death of an important Bella Coola in the summer of 1923. Theoretically, he was ignorant of sɩsaok rites, but after much discussion these were used on account of his importance as a numiti chief, an instance of the manner in which a man's personal importance overrules ceremonial dictates.

The Bella Coola believe that only some of their sɩsaok name-prerogatives came to this earth at the beginning of time with their first ancestors, and that many more have been acquired by supernatural experiences. These were especially common among their forbears as they ranged over this earth seeking places to settle in the beginning of time. No sɩsaok name can be assumed casually, each must have had some supernatural origin. But the Bella Coola have few sɩsaok origin myths, though theoretically there should be one to account

every name. The explanation appears to lie in the undoubted fact that many sɩsaok prerogatives have been acquired comparatively recently from the Bella Bella, a fact emphasized by all ~~writers~~ informants. ~~The explanation of this point~~. It is not difficult to understand, therefore, why elaborate myths ~~xxx~~ are lacking, even if such were possessed by the Bella Bella. The Bella Coola possessed certain similar rites to which the foreign prerogatives were in the process of being grafted at the time of the coming of the white man. There has since been a general decay of ceremonial life, with the result that the whole situation is in a state of flux and presents great difficulties to the investigator.

Sɩsaok names are willed and inherited in the manner already described for other prerogatives.

## The Potlatch (10 pt. Goldface c. & l.c.)

It is unfortunate that an adequate treatment of rank among the Bella Coola requires a description of the potlatch, since this ceremony, or rather group of ceremonies, includes a number of features which, logically, should have been postponed until a later stage of this monograph. An effort has been made to lessen references to non-ritualistic elements by the description, just given, of the abstract concepts of chieftainship and the sɩsaok society; the actual application of which is to be found in the ritual of the potlatch

## General Observations (Small caps)

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# ~~THE POTLATCH.~~
## General Observations.

In scientific and popular writings the term "potlatch" has been applied both to the ceremonial ~~distribution~~ giving of presents, a feature of many rites of the Indians of British Columbia, and to the rites themselves. But among the Bella Coola, ~~no ceremony, whether it be a dance, the bestowal of a name, an initiation into a secret society, a marriage, an assumption of a hereditary prerogative, or a mourning rite, is valid without the distribution of presents~~ such distribution of gifts is necessary at every rite. Accordingly every Bella Coola ceremony is essentially a potlatch. There is one, however, which the ~~Bella Coola~~ inhabitants regard as the most important of all, the goal ~~towards~~ which every arbitious man aims to reach, the rite in which his ancestral myth can be displayed. In this monograph the term "potlatch" will be limited to this rite alone, the ~~l~~ term.

Every Bella Coola is, or should be, able to recount how, in the beginning of time, the supreme god, Älquntäm, caused his ancestors to be created in ~~the~~ his house ~~of the deity~~ in the land above, whence they were sent down to populate the earth. A creation myth (1) of this type is a man's most treasured possession. Most myths describe the adventures of these first people, how they prospered in the Bella Coola country until they were able to invite to their homes guests from far and near, to whom they showed what they had achieved, through the assistance of Älquntäm, or some other supernatural being. In so doing they were carrying out Älquntäm's wishes, as decreed in many myths. He told some of these first people that if they accumulated much wealth, in those days chiefly food, there was danger that the provisions first stored would rot, hence they should

(1) Examples of these myths are ~~to be found on page~~ given in Chapter VI

# CERTAIN ASPECTS OF THE POTLATCH AMONG THE BELLA COOLA.

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cut away the bottom of the pile and present it to other men and women. The Bella Coola term for "to excise that which is rotten" is ~~[illegible]~~ ~~[illegible]~~, hence the origin, according to Indian belief, of the word, ~~[illegible]~~ tlim, which thus has the significance of "a giving away of long accumulated goods which otherwise might rot."

By the splendour of his gifts each of the first people able to give a potlatch, ~~[illegible]~~ tlim spread the prestige of his name and fame to the towns whence his guests had assembled. Further, those who had received dances from Älquntäm were able to demonstrate them. In course of time those men died who had first given potlatches, but on taking their fathers' names, the sons or other descendants endeavoured to uphold the parental tradition by inviting guests from afar and giving them valuable presents. At such a ceremony the family history, or myth, was recounted, so that the donor of a potlatch not only increased his own prestige, he incorporated therewith the traditions of his parent. This is the essence of the potlatch as carried out today. (1)

~~At the present time no man or woman can use a name unless it's testoual~~ has been validated by the distribution of presents. Judging from the extreme importance which the Bella Coola attach to this practice, and the conservation with which it is upheld, it appears highly probable that it is of ancient origin. A casual application of a name to an individual is unthinkable to a Bella Coola, as all names are embodied in myths. Frequently the myth itself may have been forgotten, but the name is still regarded as a link with the past. A distribution of presents to the inhabitants of a person's own village suffices to validate a name, but in that case the name, no matter

(1) It has been found convenient to use the present tense throughout, although the potlatch is not now carried out in its entirety.

# CERTAIN ASPECTS OF THE POTLATCH AMONG THE BELLA COOLA.